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ABSTRACT

While the concept of partnership between University and school is receiving more positive attention in both arenas, the actual implementation of such partnerships is somewhat slow to develop in educational circles in Australia, though far more common in other parts of the world. This paper is a "case study in progress," continuing from the work done by the two writers at last year's conference. The partnership is between Australian Catholic University and St. Paul's Catholic College, Greystanes and consisted of one person providing professional development in the school for two days a week focusing on literacy across the curriculum. The paper will consider a number of criteria for successful partnership and the challenges of partnership that have been acknowledged in research and apply it to this particular partnership. Additionally, a model developed by Butcher and Howard (1999) will form the basis of a micro level overview of what outcomes have been achieved as the partnership comes to the end of its second year. Contains 14 references. (Author/RS)

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Growing Partnerships: a further look at the development of a University - School partnership

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Abstract

While the concept of partnership between University and school is receiving more positive attention in both arenas, the actual implementation of such partnerships is somewhat slow to develop in educational circles in Australia, though far more common in other parts of the world. This paper is a 'case study in progress', continuing from the work done by the two writers at last year's conference. The paper will consider a number of criteria for successful partnership and the challenges of partnership that have been acknowledged in research and apply it to this particular partnership. Additionally, a model developed by Butcher and Howard (1999) will form the basis of a micro level overview of what outcomes have been achieved as the partnership comes to the end of its second year.

Background

The partnership between Australian Catholic University and St Pauls Catholic College, Greystanes began at the end of 1998. The school was being refounded and the University was invited by the Parramatta Diocese Catholic Education Office to assist in the school's

formation by providing one person to undertake professional development in the school for two days a week. This professional development was to focus on literacy across the curriculum (Beck & Humphries, 1999). The University saw that by developing a focus in the school which is situated in the western suburbs of Sydney, a higher profile for the University could emerge. As occurred in the Innovative Links project, the partnership was

'developed as a formal and explicit relationship between practising teachers and teacher educators in ways which are designed to foster professional development of both these partners' (Sachs & Groundwater Smith, 1999:222)

During the first twelve months the management committee set up the aims and responsibilities for the partnership. The two partnership liaison officers (PLOs) took responsibility for the running of the project by working together to provide professional development activities for the staff. This was done through a number of ways - from whole staff professional development days to one-on-one demonstration lessons in the classroom. By the end of the first year there was a feeling that the positive experiences of the partnership had introduced the beginnings of school change in teaching practice in terms of the literacy strategies being used by teachers across the 7-12 spectrum. In fact, the management committee was happy to continue the project into 2000 because of the outcomes that had been achieved during the year.

What is research saying about other partnerships?

Examples of professional development partnerships between schools and universities and colleges include Academic Alliances and other teacher-to-teacher approaches, mentoring/tutoring models, school improvement and restructuring efforts as well as enrichment, compensatory and motivational designed projects (Wilbur, Lambert & Young, 1987). Projects based around partnership include such developments as Innovative Links Project in Australia, Colorado Community College's Partner Program and the Centre for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth at John Hopkins University in USA.

One key factor in professional development partnerships has been the notion that professional development is no longer something that is done as an individual activity but can be a 'learning together' experience. In this model of learning, teachers become jointly responsible for their work in classrooms, and facilitation of professional development views teachers work, wisdom and experience as professional resources. Smylie and Conyers (1991) note that this concept has important implications for

how schools are organised, in other words, as places for teachers to learn as well as to teach. Through partnership, professional development becomes a meeting ground for teachers, and university personnel where there is an opportunity to exchange pedagogical knowledge and ideas in the school setting.

In USA Professional Development Schools (PDS) have been part of alliances between University and school personnel since the mid 1980s. The Holmes Group (1986) saw the development of partnership schools as a contribution to 'ongoing refinement and codification of successful teaching and schooling' thus adding to the knowledge base for teaching. The Carnegie Corporation, whose partnership schools were called clinical schools, proposed that these schools would provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to influence the development of the profession (Sedlak, 1987), and at the same time, assist the university faculty to 'increase the professional relevance of their work through

1. Mutual deliberations on problems with student learning and their possible solutions;
2. Shared teaching in the university and the schools;
3. Collaborative supervision of prospective teachers and administrators (Holmes Group, 1986).

Thornkildsen and Stein (1996) have named the following features of successful university-school partnerships: a well-defined administrative structure, mutual self-interest and common goals, participant commitment, mutual trust and respect, external support, shared decision-making, clear focus, information sharing, a manageable agenda, a dynamic nature and ongoing evaluation. These features are supported by Howard & Butcher (1999) in their discussion on educational alliances. Howard & Butcher propose a model that developed out of the experiences of alliances set up with different education systems as partners. Although the principles were 'exemplified in the different action involved in the establishment, maintenance and continuation of the Teaching Learning Consortium', the principles follow a process that could apply to this particular partnership and other kinds of alliances as well.

'The actions in the establishment phase focus upon the learning of all participants. This focus is taken further in the maintenance phase where consideration is given to seeing how the learning outcomes for all participants can be achieved more effectively and with best use of available resources. The continuation phase is concerned with enhancing both the professional bases for the initiative and its ownership by all stakeholders.' (Howard & Butcher, 1999:4)

This ownership is best described as 'learning together' - a situation that offers practicing teachers and university staff the opportunity to exchange pedagogical knowledge and ideas in the school setting.

Critiques of Professional Development Partnerships

Professional development programs have not been widely seen as an intrinsic part of making teachers more adept and productive in the classroom (Watts & Castle, 1993). Thus schools do not normally incorporate time to consult or observe colleagues or engage in professional activities such as research, learning and practising new skills, curriculum development or professional reading. Typically, administrators and parents view unfavorably anything that takes teachers away from their classroom teaching of students. In reality, teachers themselves often feel guilty about being away from their classrooms for restructuring or staff development activities (Cambone, 1995; Raywid, 1993).

Pinar (1998) is cautious about some collaborative aspects of school and university partnerships that have led to professional development schools. He writes:

Closer links to schools should not be viewed uncritically. The powerful press of daily life in the school can function as a kind of 'black hole' into which theory disappears. Survival can come to mean coinciding uncritically with situations as they are. [From the university perspective] while we are friends with our colleagues in the schools... we must maintain a respectful distance from them. We cannot advise or educate those with whom we have thoroughly identified. For teacher educators, the school must remain an object of study as well as a site for success'.

There is also the issue of unrealistic expectations that may overburden schools. Olsen (1989) reported that 'asking schools to simultaneously prepare new teachers, reinvigorate experienced teachers, engage in research and undertake widespread school improvement may be asking too much'.

Another hindrance to successful implementation of partnerships is the aspect of school culture itself. Rosaen & Hoekwater (1990) point out that school culture is characterised by egalitarian treatment of teachers. Conversely, differential treatment as reflected in differential staffing plans characteristic of some partnerships, may be viewed as favoritism. Collegial & collaborative inquiry into practice may also be challenged. "The ethic of social harmony, plus the ethic of autonomy in the classroom, means that is extremely difficult, even within a school, to say nothing of a school and a university, to really examine practice together in a serious way' (Kennedy, 1990:3).

Gore (1995) emphasises that teacher education-school partnerships or alliances do not guarantee reform and that their effectiveness involves both working across organisational cultures and gaining substantial institutional support ' in the form of resources, motives, and commitment. He writes that 'partnerships between schools and education faculties must be carefully formed and nurtured' (1995, p 32).

A case study of the 'formation and nurturing' of partnership between ACU and St Pauls Catholic College, Greystanes

While every partnership agreement is unique in terms of aims, personnel, and day to day running, there appears to be underlying principles common to each kind of alliance agreement. The ACU/St Pauls partnership has its own organic relationship that is structured through the decisions of the management committee that meets once a term. This year the work of the two liaison officers has differed from what was accomplished last year because of a number of factors that will be discussed through a closer inspection of the model proposed by Howard & Butcher (1999). The principles for educational alliances that underpin this model were presented by Butcher (1998a). The seven principles are:

- There is a shared agenda;
- Attention is focussed on core rather than peripheral issues;
- All levels of the organisations involved are committed to the goals and resource implications of the alliance;
- A win/win environment is created for all organisations;
- All aspects of the alliance are operational, actionable and open to review;

- New professional relationships and a constructive meeting of differing priorities and approaches are established. (1998a:4)

The model for effective educational alliances has three phases - **establishment, maintenance and continuation**. In the establishment phase, the key principle is shared agenda which in the case of the ACU/St Pauls partnership, has been the professional development of staff in a refounded school and the development of a higher profile for the university in the western suburbs of Sydney. In order to achieve this agenda the partnership liaison officers (PLOs) have undertaken such strategies as professional development of staff in the area of collaborative learning and planning as well as the introduction of teaching strategies to support literacy in the classroom.

The imposition of work bans on out of school activities during the earlier part of this year meant that some of the professional development work was set aside, but the University person has continued to work with individual teachers whenever and wherever possible. The results of a survey completed earlier this year showed that 70% of teachers were actually using these literacy strategies in their everyday teaching. Time restrictions and lack of confidence were the two main reasons given for not introducing literacy strategies into everyday teaching practice. In terms of changing learning culture, the work done with teachers has built up resources, introduced new teaching strategies and enabled teachers to work differently through the deliberate strategy to encourage working and planning together.

The school has worked closely with the University in terms of building up the University profile with a range of activities - local newspaper articles, Year 12 students undertaking tertiary studies with the university, and having access to the university library. One new activity this year has been the work done in the local primary feeder schools. A presentation was prepared for the primary students and their families that gave an overview of life for Year 7 students at St Pauls College. The partnership aspect was introduced for parents and the resources and skills of the university person were utilised to enable a Power Point presentation to be given at each school.

The university person has also spent much time working with students and staff in the area of religion studies. This has given the university profile in the school a 'boost' because students and staff have gained resources, unit planning assistance and workshop presentations in this subject area. In addition, the students have been able to access the personal library and resources of the university person as they worked on their assessment tasks.

In the maintenance phase, which is characterised by a win/win environment, the school and the university discuss ongoing concerns at the regular management committee meetings. The outcomes of these meetings indicate that the partnership is a flexible and responsive one, in which the aims of the partnership have been continually assessed and reframed in terms of personnel and involvement. This year there has been a real effort to clarify the role descriptions of the two liaison officers, thus enabling a better understanding of what is being done and how the partnership aims are to be achieved. It has certainly made the week to week working agreement a lot easier to manage.

One area that is in need of more time and development is that of research. The weekly workload is such that there isn't a lot of time for active research and thus, the outcomes for the university are not being met completely. Planning for 2001 intends to remedy this.

In the final phase, the continuation process has revealed that the partnership is able to make adjustments to develop new ways of achieving the outcomes. There are plans to have involvement of other university personnel next year in order to meet the changing agenda of the school and the needs of the university. As with any change process, there will be the challenge of renegotiating the terms of reference and the

aims of the partnership so that both parties are able to achieve their respective aims.

Conclusion

As in all partnerships there is a need to build up strong communication between members in order that balance is maintained for all concerned. This is a challenge in that so much is happening in the separate worlds that make up the partnership. To make time available to ensure that satisfactory collaboration does take place is vital to the ongoing well being of the partnership. However, the benefits that emerge through the development of better understanding of the needs and aspirations of both parties can only lead to new ways of achieving the aims of the partnership. This cannot occur on one year, or two years, for that matter, but will require energy, commitment and time to continue to meet the agenda of both. The model proposed by Howard & Butcher (1999) is an excellent way in which to evaluate what is happening at the micro level of this particular partnership. It recognises the organic life of partnership and the need for ongoing communication and collaboration in order to maintain the richness that can be achieved through the meshing of two distinct cultures.

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